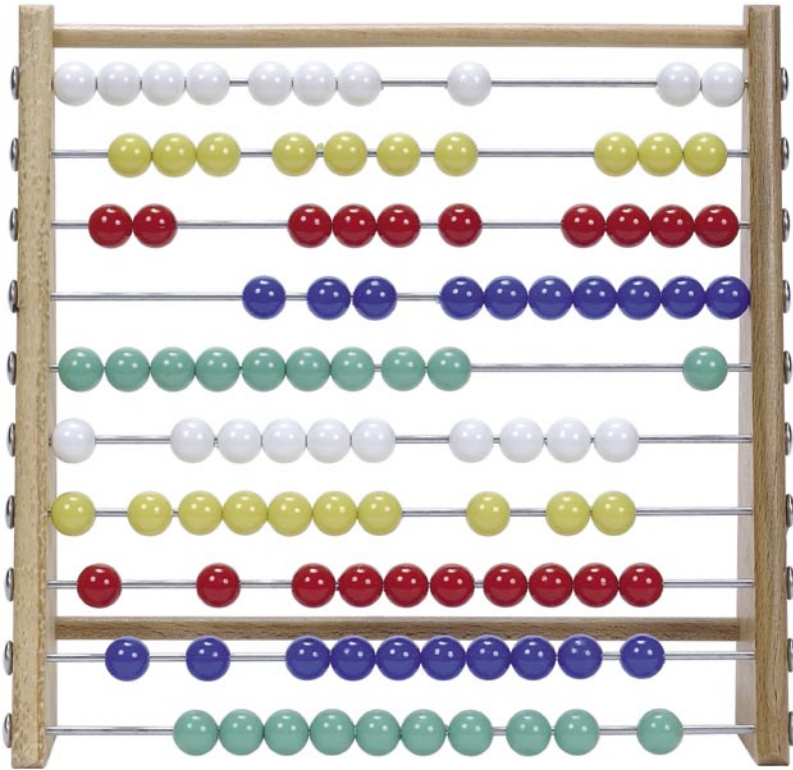


The Long and Short of It



What is the American Community Survey?

The American Community Survey (ACS) collects information from a random sample of households in all communities in the country. In any given year, each house address has about 1 chance in 40 of being selected to participate in the ACS, and no address will be selected more often than once every five years. The ACS is conducted under the same laws as the decennial census, providing the same confidential protections. Under the law, as part of the census, households selected are required to answer the survey.

Every ten years a census of the U.S. population is taken. This complete count of the population is used to reapportion the 435 seats in the House of Representatives among the states so that each state has at least two seats and all remaining congressional districts have roughly the same population. For many decades the census consisted of two parts: the short form, filled out by all households and individuals, counts the population; and the long form, which obtains demographic, housing, economic and social characteristics. The long form information was collected from a sample of the U.S. population, with about one in six households or individuals being asked to fill it out.

Since the Census is taken once every ten years, the long form information becomes outdated within a few years. After the 2000 Census, a new annual survey was begun to replace the long form questions. The American Community Survey is now being used to collect long-form type information every year instead of once in ten years.

The ACS was being developed from 2000 to 2004. With testing complete, a national sample of about 3 million housing unit addresses will be surveyed during 2005. The survey is conducted throughout the year, collecting information from one-twelfth of the selected addresses each month. Beginning in 2006, annual estimates of demographic, economic, housing, and social characteristics will be published for all counties and cities with a population of 65,000 or more. By combining sampled households over three and five year periods, annual estimates for small communities will become available by 2010.

The information collected from ACS is needed by government at all levels – federal, state, and local to manage and evaluate programs and services, and to comply with requirements stipulated in law. Businesses, other private organizations, and individuals also make use of these community-based statistics for a host of marketing, planning, and service delivery activities. Information has become a vital component of our economic and social community well-being.

The ACS estimates provide the following types of information under four main categories:

General Demographic Characteristics

Age by Sex
Race and Hispanic Origin
Household Relationship

Social Characteristics

School Enrollment and Educational Attainment
Marital Status and Fertility
Veteran Status
Place of Birth and Citizenship Status
Ancestry and Language Spoken at Home
Disability Status

Economic Characteristics

Employment Status
Industries and Occupations
Commuting to Work
Income and Poverty Status

Housing Characteristics


Total Units by Type
Year Structure Built
Number of Rooms
Heating Fuel
Housing Value
Mortgage Status, Owner Cost, and Rent
Vehicles Available

By collecting information from households every month, community-based data is obtained with less of a burden on households than was the case with the census long form. The ACS has been designed to provide timely annual estimates of information needed for the proper functioning of government at all levels, for our economic system, and for our social and community life. ⓘ

More? <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

Publication Schedule for the American Community Survey

Type of Data	Population Size of Area	Data for the Previous Year Released in the Summer of:							
		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010+
Annual estimates	≥250,000								
Annual estimates	≥65,000								
3-year averages	≥20,000								
5-year averages	Census Tract and Block Group*								

 Data reflect American Community Survey testing through 2004

* Census tracts are small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county averaging about 4,000 inhabitants. Census block groups generally contain between 600 and 3,000 people. The smallest geographic level for which data will be produced is the block group; the Census Bureau will not publish estimates for small numbers of people or areas if there is a probability that an individual can be identified.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau